AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-46. (cancelled)

47. (new) A computer-implemented method for retrieving information associated with a set of materials, the method comprising:

storing in a data structure a plurality of attribute-value pairs associated with the materials, wherein each of a plurality of values has an association with at least one of a plurality of attributes characterizing the materials;

in response to a free-text query, computing dynamically at run-time a responsive navigation state using the data structure, wherein:

the responsive navigation state corresponds to a particular expression that represents a multi-term interpretation of the free-text query, the particular expression including at least a conjunction of a first attribute-value pair having a first attribute and a second attribute-value pair having a second attribute;

the first attribute-value pair describes all of the materials corresponding to the responsive navigation state and does not describe all the materials that the first attribute characterizes;

the second attribute-value pair describes all of the materials corresponding to the responsive navigation state and does not describe all the materials that the second attribute characterizes; and

the first attribute-value pair and the second attribute-value pair are mutually incomparable.

48. (new) The method of claim 47, wherein the multi-term interpretation of the free-text query is minimal.

49. (new) The method of claim 47, wherein the first attribute is different from the second attribute.

50. (new) A computer program product, residing on a computer-readable medium, for use in retrieving information associated with a set of materials, the computer program product comprising instructions for causing a computer to:

provide a search interface including a free-text search tool for accepting free-text queries;

compute dynamically, in response to a free-text query, a navigation state that corresponds to a particular expression of attribute-value pairs associated with the materials, wherein each of a plurality of values has an association with at least one of a plurality of attributes characterizing the materials, and wherein the attribute-value pairs are accessed from a data structure;

wherein a first dynamically computed navigation state corresponds to a multi-term interpretation of a first received free-text query and includes at least a conjunction of a first attribute-value pair having a first attribute and a second attribute-value pair having a second attribute, wherein:

the first attribute-value pair describes all of the materials corresponding to the responsive navigation state and does not describe all the materials that the first attribute characterizes;

the second attribute-value pair describes all of the materials corresponding to the responsive navigation state and does not describe all the materials that the second attribute characterizes; and

the first attribute-value pair and the second attribute-value pair are mutually incomparable.

51. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, wherein a second dynamically computed navigation state corresponds to a second received free-text query and includes only one attribute-value pair.

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52. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, wherein a second dynamically computed navigation state corresponds to a second received free-text query and includes a disjunction of a first attribute-value pair and a second attribute-value pair.

53. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, wherein the search interface ignores stop words in the free-text query.

54. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, wherein the search interface treats syntactically related words as equivalent.

55. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, wherein the search interface treats semantically related words as equivalent.

56. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, wherein the search interface performs automatic spelling corrections.

57. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, wherein the search interface supports the specification of delimited phrases.

58. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, wherein the search interface supports constraining a search to a subset of materials corresponding to a current navigation state where the free-text query is accepted.

59. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, wherein the free-text search tool enables searching descriptive information from a profile for each of the materials in the set of materials.

60. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, wherein the search interface includes a full-text search tool for searching the set of materials.

61. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, wherein the search interface provides a display of a set of search results for a query, the set of search results including one or more multi-term interpretations when the dynamically-computed navigation state corresponds to a multi-term interpretation of the query.

62. (new) The computer program product of claim 61, wherein the set of search results includes navigation options to each navigation state corresponding to the one or more multi-term interpretations.

63. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, the computer program product further comprising instructions for causing the computer to generate a first inverted index relating query terms to attribute-value pairs and a second inverted index relating attribute-value pairs to materials.

64. (new) The computer program product of claim 50, the computer program product further comprising instructions for causing the computer to provide a navigation interface, the navigation interface including a guided navigation tool providing a set of navigation options from a current navigation state to one or more other navigation states, each navigation option providing a direct path to one of the one or more other navigation states.

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